

Housing Our Heroes:

Suggestions to Grow the VA Medical Foster Home Program

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Background

- Costs of long-term institutional care and consumer preferences are shifting care from facility-based to community-based care
- Medical Foster Home (MFH) merges adult foster care with Home Based Primary Care (HBPC)
- MFH provides an alternative to nursing home for selected Veterans with nursing home level of care needs who cannot safely remain at home

How Medical Foster Home Works

- A MFH caregiver is an individual in the community
- The MFH caregiver provides daily personal assistance and supervision for up to 3 Veterans
- VA HBPC provides comprehensive medical care, management, and caregiver education
- VA MFH Coordinator provides oversight
- Veteran pays for MFH (room and board) directly to the caregiver ranging from \$1500 - \$3500/month

Growth of Medical Foster Home Program

- MFH is a rapidly expanding VA alternative to nursing home placement for Veterans:
- From 2008-2010 sites have expanded from 3 to 31
- 108 sites are currently initiating a program with >2,500 participants

Aims of Study

- To understand why certain MFH programs nationally have been slow to get off the ground
- Provide suggestions as how to overcome challenges to MFH program growth

Methods

Data Sources:

- Telephone interviews with MFH program coordinators and program support assistants (N = 19)
- In-person interviews and focus groups with local HBPC teams (N = 28) conducted during site visits

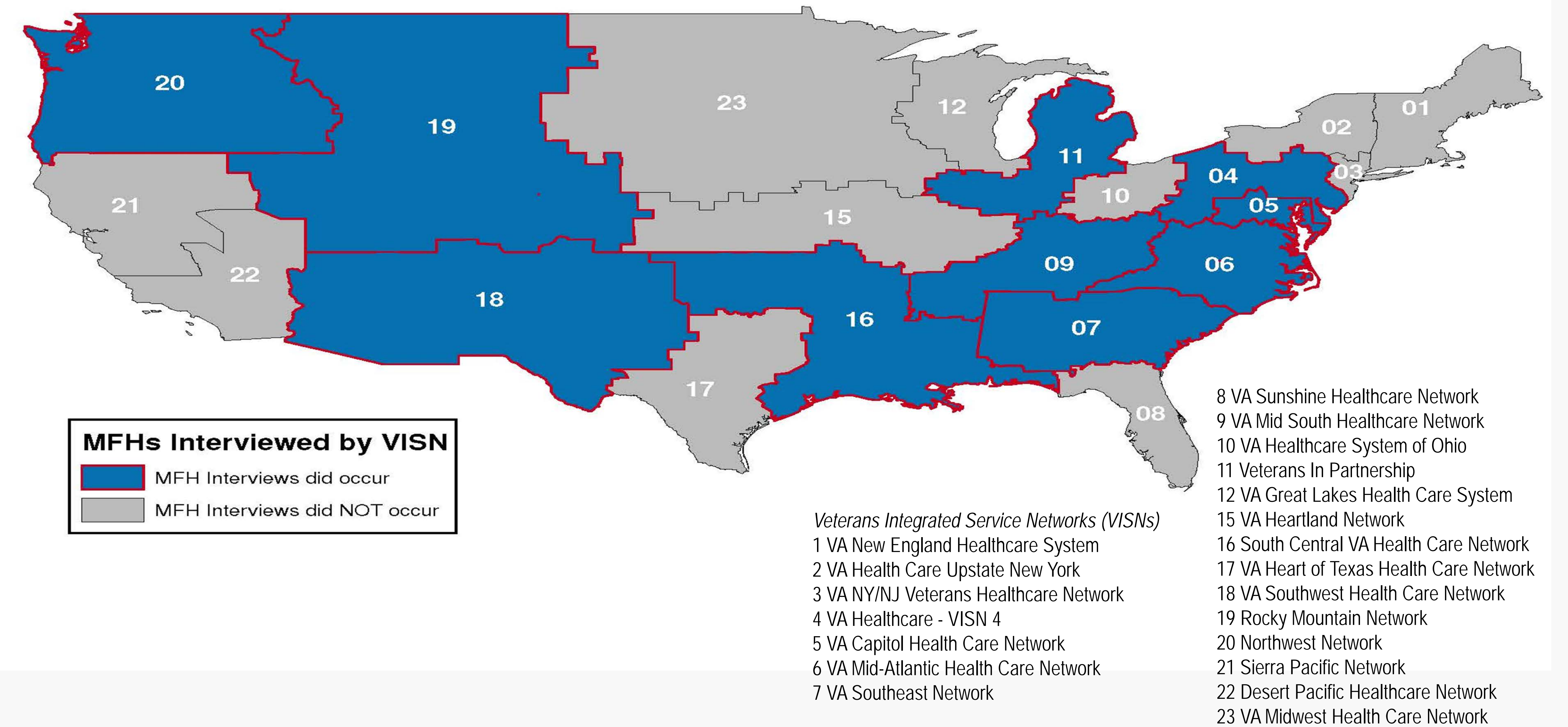
Data Collection:

- Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and conducted by a four-member multi-disciplinary research team
- Field notes and team impressions were gathered throughout

Analysis:

- Interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analyzed by three members of the research team using in vivo coding in Atlas.ti. Through team discussions codes and themes emerged from the data

Medical Foster Homes Interviewed by VISN



Results

Five main themes emerged to enhance MFH program growth:

- Dedicated MFH Coordinator
- Alignment of right caregiver, right home, and right Veteran
- Pursuit and receipt of appropriate MFH referrals
- Adequate enlistment of HBPC support
- Navigation and interpretation of national, state, and VA policies

"Well I think it's when we are able to successfully make a placement and the Veteran is happy and they tell us and I go out to the home and they say, wow this is the best program ever."

"I think I like most seeing when we find a really good fit. Like a good Veteran that goes in with a wonderful caregiver and all the other Veterans in the house. And when there's a good fit, the cohesive group of family essentially in the home, doing well together... I really enjoy seeing the end result of all of the hard work leading up to the placement."

"So the concept of Medical Foster Homes for some is a bit over their head. And then two, you know, getting Veteran to part their ways with their income to pay for care is another challenge."

"The HBPC has to have an opening, if they don't have an opening that Veteran cannot be admitted into the Medical Foster Home Program."

"That's the issue that in the places where HBPC and the Medical Foster Home are aligned together, I think those people have a better time than like mine where there's, I'm under social work and HBPC is under primary care."

"The other challenge we have, because anyone can open these homes, our caregivers can say to us, look, we're really not happy with the VA. We don't like all the rules. We don't like all the legislation so we're just gonna go on our own and then the patient can elect to say, I'm gonna stay with this caregiver. So we have to really walk a very fine line with caregivers to that extent."

Conclusion/ Next Steps

- If the VA addresses themes identified in this research, MFH programs may grow to become more viable, attainable, and appealing options for long-term care for Veterans while easing the strain on already overcrowded nursing home facilities
- This research contributes to a larger national study designed to examine factors influencing enrollment in the VA MFH program and answer, the question: *"Is MFH a safe, cost effective substitute to nursing home care for eligible Veterans?"*

All research was approved by the VA Central Institutional Research Board. Please contact leah.haverhals@va.gov with comments.

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